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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 003081

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA (M. IRWIN) AND EUR/ERA (J. GIAUQUE)

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SUBJECT: ESDP OFFICIALS SHOW LITTLE ENTHUSIASM FOR LEBANON BORDER MISSION

REF: A. STATE 128335

¶B. USEU BRUSSELS 2873

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Laurence Wohlers for reason
s 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C/NF) Summary: European Union member states have agreed to send a small, political exploratory team to the region later this month to determine Lebanese and Syrian willingness to accept an EU border mission. However, HR Solana remains opposed to the EU deploying an ESDP mission and has instructed ESDP planners to remain uninvolved in the matter for the time being. Even if proponents of the idea are able to overcome Solana's opposition, the EU is unlikely to take further steps to launch a mission before the conclusion of the Presidential election process in Lebanon. End Summary.

¶12. (C) USEU Pol-Mil and Political officers continue to consult with officials from EU institutions and member states to discuss the evolution of the EU's thinking on a Lebanon-Syria border mission. Alison Weston and Riccardo Chelleri, Council ESDP officials responsible for Middle East missions, confirmed that the EU will send Council Middle East Director Christian Jouret and Policy Planning Director Helga Schmid to Damascus and Beirut in mid-October to determine Syrian and Lebanese commitment to the proposal and establish potential conditions for EU engagement. This "exploratory" mission is purposely small so as not to attract too much attention or press. Contacts drew the distinction between the Schmid-Jouret trip and a formal fact-finding mission, noting that each of the EU's previous fact-finding missions has resulted in an ESDP operation, so they do not wish to give the impression that there is a mission on the table. Member states are not ready to signal that level of commitment and remain only in the preliminary stages of thinking about the parameters of the mission.

¶13. (C/NF) Moreover, our interlocutors emphasized that HR Solana is opposed to the EU taking on this role and has instructed the ESDP planners to remain uninvolved with the proposal for now. According to Weston, the view among many institutional officials is that the EU will be setting themselves up for failure by taking on this task, an obviously undesirable outcome for the credibility of ESDP. ESDP missions can be deployed only under explicit parameters and conditions, namely, at the request of the UN or host nation, with achievable objectives, and with a clear, or at minimum, foreseeable, exit strategy. EU officials and some

member states would be loathe for the EU to field a mission that many think would be unlikely to accomplish its goals and would have little possibility of a realistic and timely end state.

¶4. (C) Even if supporters of the proposal are able to overcome Solana's opposition, which would likely be a lengthy process, many member states still have reservations about the mission and are showing little enthusiasm for taking further steps before the Lebanese Presidential elections conclude. A Spanish Perm Rep contact noted that, because of the lukewarm reception of their proposal by many EU members, they too are becoming less vocal in their advocacy for the time being. Asked about prospects and likely timelines for further decisions on the mission, Weston noted her personal view that the mission would likely never happen, and Chelleri noted separately that the EU launched a similar, small exploratory mission almost one year ago that went "nowhere." He shared his personal assessment that because some member states' thinking on engaging Damascus has shifted since last year, the current debate, in part, provides a guise for a broader discussion of the EU's future engagement with Syria.

¶5. (C/NF) Comment: After a flurry of activity in response to the Spanish proposal, the reality and pitfalls of the potential undertaking seem to be setting in for EU officials. The EU's way ahead on the border mission will be more transparent when Schmid and Jouret return from the region, but the decision to send a formal fact-finding mission will not be taken lightly by member states and will probably generate a lengthy debate. Additionally, in our view, neither Solana's opposition nor the political toll the mission could take on an already stretched ESDP should be underestimated. Both of these factors could dramatically

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limit the parameters of the mission, if not sink the idea altogether. End comment.

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